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# DOROTHY AND THE BAKER'S DOZEN



*By Victoria Arnold  
Photos courtesy of the author*

“It is a war, viewed in its inherent quality, to establish, on impregnable rocks, the rights of the individual, and it is a war to establish and revive the stature of man. Perhaps it might seem a paradox that a war undertaken in the name of liberty and right should require, as a necessary part of its processes, the surrender for the time being of so many of the dearly valued liberties and rights.”

**Winston Churchill: War Speech**  
September 3, 1939

**A**s Big-Dad, Nanny and the Baker’s Dozen, all their children, crowded near the radio to listen to Churchill’s voice, big-dad placed his left hand on his wife and his right hand on the wood that replaced the leg he lost twenty-three years ago. He saw as his sons, John, Harry, and Ste talked of enlisting and serving. His older daughters edged closer to their husbands, each man took his wife’s hand and the static voices on the radio blared through the silence.

When Big-Dad was discharged in 1916, he never thought his children would be fighting the same war twenty-three years later. He remembered the trenches of France, how they were moist with carnage, the screams as young men were amputated and the rats that gnawed on their crudely hacked limbs. He recalls pulling boys out of burning battle tanks. The world and his family fell into another savage and bloody war.

The year Dorothy, Big-Dad’s daughter, turned twenty-two she was plunged into a war that would reshape her entire existence. These years hardened her hands, sharpen her wits, and became stories for her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great grand children. She often said, “your generation knows nothing of war, I was at war,” when she told these stories. At twenty-two she left her job at the bank and joined in the war effort by enlisting to work in an airplane manufacturing factory

by day and as an emergency room nurse by night. She worked through air raids, corpses, and constant bombings only to return to a home where food was rationed, family scarce and curfews were strict. Her freedom was stripped and her liberty challenged by the state of war and battle. Uniform or civilian one must service the nation and could be bombed and killed. Where was her pursuit of happiness?

The day Dorothy married James Arnold their



home was bombed by the Nazis. Everything they owned and worked for, her property, were demolished. She was left to clean up the ramparts in between air raids after her husband returned to service. It would be decades later when she worked in a bank in downtown Toronto, when she told the young tellers that heavy construction and loud jack-hammering outside was a pitiful reason to be distracted from one’s duties.

“We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy.”

**Winston Churchill: Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat**  
May 13, 1940

The war did not last months, but years. It dragged the men of the Mann Clan to all the corners of the globe, Ste in North Africa, John in France and Harry in India. My uncle Ste would recount stories of fighting Rommel in a desert that scorched and burned. And how they ate boiled rat stew slop to fill their bellies. When Churchill spoke of fighting in speeches he did not account for the infestation of the soldier's soul in full detail. The creepy crawlies, as Ste liked to call lice, would burrow under your flesh right into your mind and make you jump, twist and inch like a poor street mutt.

Uncle Harry in India witnessed as the Japanese scorched the rice fields, leaving the people starved, and women and girls raped. Was it the Axis powers that were tyrannical or the nature of war? All he saw were young boys from both sides dying and countries torn apart by machine guns and Spitfires. It seemed as though everyone involved was lamentable. When

Harry's commanding officer ordered them to abandon India one city and village at a time, he did not have the courage to stay and fight for the people. In five years he would come to realize that 'just following orders' was not an excuse for neglecting human life.

Before the late medieval ages it was customary that Kings and the landed gentry rode into battle with their armies to conquer, and/or defend. The battlefields of France were not drenched with the blood of noblemen and kings but of English boys who were killed far from home and hearth. John was standing in the very place his father lost his leg twenty-four years ago, French soil was red with our family's blood. Although he lost no limbs, he lost his notion of humanity in a war for humanity. In 1939 neither King George VI nor Winston Churchill took up arms, or piloted planes. Churchill gave speeches about the 'policy' for this war, and the men of Dorothy's family fought it.





“We did not make this war, we did not seek it. We did all we could to avoid it. We did too much to avoid it. We went so far at times in trying to avoid it as to be almost destroyed by it when it broke upon us. But that dangerous corner has been turned, and with every month and every year that passes we shall confront the evil-doers with weapons as plentiful, as sharp, and as destructive as those with which they have sought to establish their hateful domination.”

**Winston Churchill: Preparation-Liberation-Assault**  
December 30, 1941

One year after Dorothy Mann became Mrs. Arnold she received news that her husband would not be receiving leave to celebrate the New Year with her. Even though she was married, she returned to live in her father's home and helped her mother care for the grandchildren. She could not bear living by herself and wanted to be surrounded by family again. As Churchill's speech went on, Big-Dad shut off the radio and threw it into the hall closet. He hated the sound of that man's voice because he conjured words to lull the nation into his will.

“This war could have been avoided and it was the inadequacies of his party that led to the war. I have

served King and Country in a war of this nature before and it was not to happen again!”

With his daughters living bullets away from being widowed, Big-Dad wondered how much longer rations would be used, if his home was safe at night, and if the world could ever return to normal. Winston Churchill's voice and words had no place in my family's home. My grandmother often spoke of her disdain for the man who 'led' England through her darkest hour; more like “into the dark” she would say. It is no wonder he was voted out of power as soon as the war was over. His oratory skills did not save the English and neither did the Americans that

roamed the streets and towns of the UK.

At this point in the war, massive amounts of people were strapped for cash. The English soldiers were living off the generosity and limited resources of the people. My grandmother remembered the day American soldiers touched English soil. They had wide smiles plastered to their faces, fresh pressed uniforms and pockets full of money. She saw them spirited and envied their innocence and ignorance. Their money attracted girls, booze and a temporary good time. They would trot down the street of her village and buy more food than an entire ration booklet could provide. Many English shopkeepers would sell necessities like butter, meat and milk to Americans for high prices, while my grandmother's family pinched every penny waiting for ration day.

The money they spent while the English boys toiled under Nazi rule would not keep them out of planes and brigades. They came in haughty, and many laughed at the efforts of the English to keep the Nazis out. She thought that in the end once the Nazis have had their say, they too will cry out to their mothers when their legs were amputated and bullets removed in pairs.

#### Vacation from War but not from Class

It is 1942; Mister and Misses Arnold take a much-needed vacation when Mister Arnold received three

days leave. They head down to Blackpool for an ocean view, cool breeze and relaxation. The war followed them on vacation to a beautiful seaside inn. They still lived off their ration books. The amount of butter, bread and milk one could have at mealtime was determined by one's ration cards. No butter rations, no butter with your bread. Of course, the rich could buy what they liked, but for the Arnolds it was rationed. Dressed in thin cotton trousers, and a simple skirt with no silk stockings in a dining room with a grand piano, bay windows, a crystal chandelier, and crisp table linens, they were seen un t company to dine with.

It was when respect was repeatedly denied to them by the jeering guests dressed in French fashions and real silk hosiery, that the manager came out and lectured the entire dining room. He questioned their nationalism and morals as good English people. "These people that fought for this country and serviced the war efforts everyday and were not to be treated like foolish lepers."

My grandmother was at once embarrassed and proud. She was a baker's daughter in a small town in Manchester and could never imagine having the value of her work praised and used as guilt towards the rich and well dressed. The manager made sure they were comfortable for the remainder of their stay; plenty of butter and sugar to go around.

"Tyranny is our foe, whatever trappings or disguise it wears, whatever language it speaks, be it external or internal, we must forever be on our guard, ever mobilised, ever vigilant, always ready to spring at its throat. In all this, we march together. Not only do we march and strive shoulder to shoulder at this moment under the fire of the enemy on the fields of war or in the air, but also in those realms of thought which are consecrated to the rights and the dignity of man."

*Winston Churchill: The Price of Greatness*  
1943

The dark heavy drapes covered any light from escaping into the night. Big-Dad closed the bake-shop for the day, and everyone sat at the table, ready to consume the dinner Nanny prepared. One could not help but

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notice the gender imbalance, more women than men sat and said grace. My grandmother, Dorothy, would often tell stories about how she could not see the end of the war. It seemed like one large black cloud looming over her homeland. All around the Mann clan were letters of missing-in-actions or killed-in-actions. It was challenging not to hope for a letter as the postman walked down the street or wrench away in pain if a uniformed man holding a telegram rounded the corner. To live on a constant edge of death and hope was the condition. The people were prepared for it all: death, invasion, happiness and sorrow. Dorothy worked long hours in an airplane factory through that. Her dainty hands were smeared. Her Victorian upbringing did not prepare her for war and machine death.

The Mann clan and England would pay the price of readiness with more dark nights ahead in order to prepare for the enemy's attack. An enemy that mobilized under the watchful eye of the British Empire. An enemy that built work camps of death across the European continent. An enemy that marches across continents destroying, and capturing.



“I have also to announce to the House that during the night and the early hours of this morning the first of the series of landings in force upon the European Continent has taken place. In this case the liberating assault fell upon the coast of France. An immense armada of upwards of 4,000 ships, together with several thousand smaller craft, crossed the Channel. Massed airborne landings have been successfully effected behind the enemy lines, and landings on the beaches are proceeding at various points at the present time. The fire of the shore batteries has been largely quelled. The obstacles that were constructed in the sea have not proved so difficult as was apprehended.”

### **Winston Churchill: *The Invasion of France*** June 6, 1944

It was so close now, she thought. Soon Jim, Ste, John and Harry would be coming home. Little Jeanie would have a father, Jim, for the first time in so long. The newspapers were headlining the invasion and Dorothy could not look at them on her way to work. She did not want to test the fates because, so far, none of her brothers, brother-in-laws or husband were lost to gunfire. Just concentrate on the assembly line, wait for the lunch bell, smoke your last cigarette, finish chores before curfew, and head over to the hospital for graveyard shift. Over, and over again until it felt like she could sleep on her walk because her body knew the routine better than her mind.

Dorothy was not a silly woman by any stretch of the imagination. After working in a factory, producing ammunition and airplane engines, she knew the force it took to invade the continent. The conversations her father had with her brothers and husband when they were on leave gave her a good idea of the risks involved in such an endeavor. It has been a while since John has written and she wondered what was in store for him. Big-Dad, a Victorian gentleman, did not display tears, but she knew that if he lost any of his sons he would be torn apart inside. There would be no glory if they did not come home.



“Yesterday morning at 2:41 a.m. at Headquarters, General Jodl, the representative of the German High Command, and Grand Admiral Doenitz, the designated head of the German State, signed the act of unconditional surrender of all German Land, sea, and air forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force, and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command.”

*Winston Churchill: End of War in Europe*  
May 8, 1945

It was over. Simple enough to say but, such a long time before she could even utter those three little words. Months passed by before the entire family was reunited. Ste, John, Harry and her Jim were all back in little Bolton, Manchester. The rations did not end for another four years; buildings needed mending, the country was in debt, and families were broken. This would be known as the generation of strong, brave and resistant of evil and tyranny. But all that did not matter in the moment. It was over.

The Mann clan survived the war and would

remain close for years to come. Many of the Baker's Dozen would eventually move out of Manchester, and some out of England to Canada. The distance had no effect on the bond that kept them together. Although they ended the war together as a family, death and time would separate them in body. This summer, Ste in England and Dorothy in Canada, the youngest and last of the Baker's Dozen, 89 and 94, rejoined their family within 24 hours of one another.

The family has a saying that if you are of the Mann clan you are of the blood and if you marry in, you are a hero because you have to put up with us.